

I.

STONE CIRCLES NEAR SHAP, WESTMORELAND. BY THE REV. JAMES SIMPSON, VICAR OF SHAP. (Plate XV.)

In the neighbourhood of Shap, in the county of Westmoreland, may still be seen several of those curious stone circles, the use and object of which have not yet been satisfactorily explained. They are more or less complete according to the nature and cultivation of the ground upon which they stand, and sometimes consist of two, in some cases of three, concentric circles. The stones have been originally upright, though many of them are now fallen, and some of them are partially buried in the ground. In any particular circle the stones do not much vary in size, but there is a wide difference between those forming one circle, and those used for another. In some instances the stones are five or six feet in length, and of proportionate thickness. They are for the most part, though not invariably, granite boulders, are of great weight, and must have cost much labour to place them in position. They would not indeed have to be conveyed any great distance; and it is not improbable that the difference in size of the stones used in the formation of different circles may have depended entirely upon the size and character of the "boulders" scattered about the particular locality in which the circle stands. At Gunnerkeld not far from Shap, I had the pleasure of showing Mr Stuart, secretary to the Society of Antiquaries, one of those circles, the stones of which are of great size and weight. At Gamelins, in the parish of Orton, there are the remains of another, which, with the exception of the long upright stone, is in its general characteristics not unlike the circle in Cumberland, well known as Long Meg and her daughters. Several of the stones have been broken up and destroyed, but there is no difficulty in fixing their original site, and clearly tracing the circumfer-

ence of the circle; the diameter of which is about 135 feet. At Gunnerkeld there are two concentric circles, the outer of which measures about 100 feet across, the inner about 49 feet. It may be observed, that these measurements cannot be made with exact accuracy, because the stones forming the circle having fallen in different directions, it is not always easy to fix the points to and from which the measurements should be made. There are other stone circles in the neighbourhood similar to those at Gamelins and Gunnerkeld; but at present I wish to call attention to a class formed of upright stones, much smaller in size, and standing not more than 20 inches or two feet above the ground, and I may remark that it is not unusual to find two of these circles adjoining, one of which is much more perfect than the other. I have specially noted two instances in which the circles are concentric, in one of which most of the stones remain; in the other the outer circle has either been partially destroyed, or it may be the few stones now remaining mark the commencement of a work which has never been completed. Two such concentric circles as those I have described may be seen upon Knipe Scar, a short distance from Shap; another in the adjoining field; and two others exactly similar, with the exception of the third innermost circle, may be found at Odindale, in the parish of Crosby Ravensworth. I mention these more particularly, because I have had the space within the circles carefully examined, and in each of them discovered faint traces of burnt matter.

At Knipe Scar, I had the advantage of Mr Stuart's great experience and careful judgment; and the results of our examination were sufficient to satisfy us, that at some remote period burnt matter had been deposited within the innermost of the three concentric circles. Near the centre of the larger and more perfect of the two sets of circles adjoining each other, about 18 inches below the surface, we found a rough flat-shaped stone 15 inches in width, and about 2 feet 6 inches in length. Under this stone were evident traces of charcoal and burnt earth, but no bones. The deposit was not exactly in the centre, but rather towards the northwest side of the circle, a peculiarity which I noted in two other instances in which the deposit was found. The diameter of the outside circle is 63 feet, the second 21 feet, and the innermost of the three within which the flat stone covering the deposit was placed, is 7 feet.

From the centre of this circle to the centre of the one adjoining, the distance is 96 feet. In the centre space of this other circle, about the same depth below the surface, we found a rude pavement of cobbles about 6 feet in length and 4 feet in width, and under this pavement a similar deposit of charcoal.

At Odindale, where two circles occupy the same relative positions, there was the same kind of deposit found within the innermost circle; but if there ever had been a stone or pavement, it had been disturbed on some previous occasion, when the ground had been partially examined. The position of the deposit was the same as in the circles upon Knipe Scar, and the present condition of the two circles are relatively the same. There is, however, at Odindale, a stone placed half-way between the two concentric circles. It is of the same size and character as those forming the circles, and though not in a line due east from the centre, is very nearly so. Neither at Odindale nor at Knipe Scar was any deposit found either within the space between the circle, or near to or under the stones forming it, though some of them were dug around, and some of them taken out of their position, and the site carefully examined. I need hardly say, that the stones disturbed were replaced, and the circles left as nearly as possible in the condition in which they were found. I do not at present venture to offer any opinion upon the use of those circles or their date, or the people by whom they were erected; my object is to collect and record facts, not to deduce inferences from or found theories upon those facts; and I shall merely observe, that whatever other uses they may have had, they have at some period or other been used as places of deposit for the ashes of the dead.

It is however worthy of observation, and suggestive of interesting thoughts, that barrows, or what are, in the neighbourhood of Shap, called hurrocks or raises, seem to have been formed in places originally occupied by these stone circles. At a place called Penhurrock, on the same moor as the circles at Odindale, there still exists one of those stone circles, within which, at no distant period, there was a large barrow. Tradition says, that when the barrow or hurrock was removed, burnt bones were found deposited in a small cist-shaped hole cut into the rock, and covered with a flat stone. Within the innermost circle at Gunnerkeld, there are still the remains of a barrow or hurrock, which, though

disturbed, does not appear to have been at any time thoroughly examined. Barrows or raises similar in character, though not always surrounded with a circle of stones, are by no means uncommon in the locality. At Sill-how, Odindale, closely adjoining the stone circles, I had one of these barrows opened, and, on removing the stones, found a cist, one side of which was formed by the rock, the other and the ends of large stones, and the cover was a rough limestone slab split from the rock, where it had cropped up to the surface, and placed upon its natural bed. The cist was not square, measuring on one side 1 foot 8 inches, on the other 1 foot 4 inches; the width was 14 inches, and the depth 10 inches; and the length of the stone that formed the covering 2 feet 6 inches. It was quite full of small portions of bone, which did not seem to have been much burnt. Horses' teeth and unburnt bones were found amongst the stones above the cist, but no weapons or ornaments of any kind.

Another raise which I have had examined is on Muir Divock, not far from a circle of stones called Standing Stones. This raise is remarkable, not only because it is star-shaped, but because towards the west side, about halfway between the centre and the circumference, there are four upright stones placed in a straight row, and probably there were originally five. Opposite the largest of these stones, and in the centre of the raise, was found a deposit of ashes and burnt bones, which had been enclosed in an urn. The stones forming the heap had been much disturbed, and the urn was broken; but when first discovered the rim was entire, and measured 13 inches across. It was of the rudest manufacture, sun-dried, and had been placed upside down. The raise could not at that time be further examined; but it is probable that each of the upright stones may have marked a similar deposit. Upon the same moor, within a very short distance, there is another barrow, formed in the same way, having the same general appearance, and called by the same name of "raise," which, when opened, was found to contain a cist formed of stones, and measuring 4 feet 4 inches in length, 1 foot 2 inches in width, and 2 feet 2 inches in depth. Each of the two sides had originally been formed of one stone; but one had evidently been broken by the workmen employed to place it, and the two pieces were supported by a third. The cover consisted of two limestone slabs taken from the surface of the rock, and placed with the natural bed downwards;

the bottom was flagged with flat stones of different sizes. This cist or coffin contained portions of a skeleton, and, from the position in which the thigh-bones were found, it would appear that the legs must have been doubled underneath. The body had been laid east and west, and the thigh-bones were at the east end of the coffin. Careful search was made for weapons or ornaments, but nothing whatever could be found. The bones were afterwards restored to their place, and the cover of the cist placed in its original position. I have mentioned the barrows thus examined, partly because the three, though similar in appearance and character, disclosed three different kinds of sepulture, and partly because, though not themselves now surrounded by upright stones, they are similar to others so encircled, and are all of them in close proximity to stone circles. It is not improbable that the people by whom these barrows or raises were erected occasionally chose the space within an existing stone circle upon which to deposit the ashes of their dead, and then raised a barrow to cover them, and commemorate the fact. At some earlier period the ashes of another race may have been buried in the same place, and a circle of stones formed to mark and protect the deposit. As a general rule, when an urn or a cist is covered by a barrow or raise, it seems originally to have been placed on the surface of the ground, and the stones or earth heaped around it. When any deposit is found within a circle of stones, it is fifteen or twenty inches below the natural surface, and the ground remains at its original level.

Whether these stone circles have had any other use than to mark a place of sepulture, protect the ashes of the dead, or do honour to the deceased, it is impossible to determine. That some of them have been used as places of burial there can be no doubt; that some of them have been twice used by two different races is highly probable; but whether, when originally constructed, they were meant to enclose the ashes of one person, or of as many as there are stones in the circles, or of a whole tribe, or of the chief of a tribe, it is impossible to say. So far as I have been able to examine the subject, I am inclined to the opinion that in each circle, or each set of concentric circles, there will be found only one deposit. It may be necessary to observe, that though many of the stones forming the circles have been carefully examined, I have never found any marks or characters upon them.

I have purposely omitted all allusion to the remains of the avenue near Shap, and "the huge stones of a pyramidal form, some of them nine feet high and fourteen thick, standing in a row for near a mile, at an equal distance," because the facts connected with this remarkable monument have recently been published in the "Archæological Journal." But there are scattered about the district several large granite boulders, which seem to have been placed in their present position by the hand of man; and, with the kind permission of the Society, I shall on some future occasion have much pleasure in detailing a few facts connected with these huge and massive monoliths in my own immediate neighbourhood.

Mr JOHN STUART added some facts tending to show the analogous results which had attended diggings in Scottish circles of stones. Among others he referred to a remarkable monument of two concentric circles on the estate of Bognie, in Aberdeenshire, belonging to Mr Morison, which had been dug into by that gentleman. The result showed traces of pavement, under which layers of bones in a pulverised state, and burnt matter, appeared. In the centre of the innermost circle an urn was found, the fragments of which were now sent to the museum by Mr Morison. Mr Stuart added that Mr Simpson had set an example of collecting facts, which it was to be regretted was not more generally followed by English antiquaries, some of whom, after attaching the term "temple" to the stone circles, without any vestige of reliable authority, proceeded to speculate and draw inferences which had not added to our information on these monuments beyond what was known in the days of Aubrey and Stukeley, when the "Druid temple" theory took shape. As an instance of the value of facts in testing "Druidical" theories, he noticed the following:—Hodson, the painstaking historian of Northumberland, describes a large isolated mass of rock called the Punch-Bowl Stone, near Shaftoe Crags, which he supposes to be a rock altar of the primitive heathen, and the basins in it to be consecrated to the Druidical Hu. Dr Raine, the biographer of Hodson, states that the basins have been formed by the action of the weather on the soft portions of the rock, and that the punch-bowl is accounted for by the following circumstance, recorded in the *Newcastle Courant* for 9th October 1725, where it

is stated that, on the marriage of Sir William Blakett (not long before), Shaftoe Vaughan, Esq. caused Shaftoe Crag to be illuminated in the night, and a large punch-bowl was cut in the most elevated rock, which was filled with such a generous supply of liquor as was more than sufficient for the vast crowd of neighbouring inhabitants.

Dr JOHN ALEX. SMITH stated that in Cornwall, and especially in the Scilly Islands, which he had recently the pleasure of visiting, similar basins in stones were frequently found, which had been evidently formed by the action of the weather. They generally contained water and some gravel-like debris of the rock, which was moved backwards and forwards by the winds.



Rev. Jas Simpson, Shap

W & A. K. Johnston, Edin^g

STANDING STONES. AT SHAP, WESTMORLAND.